

SUNDAY SERMON

A Scholarly Discourse By
The Rev. Dr. John Love.

ASHUR PARK, N. J.—The Rev. Dr. John Love, Jr., preached on "The Mystery of the Kingdom of God" in the First Baptist Church here. He took as his text David 1:34: "A stone cut out without hands which smote the images." Dr. Love said:

In the poem called "Giles Corey" the great author has said: "Do you believe in dreams? Why, yes and no. When they come true, then I believe in them; when they come false I don't believe in them." This is doubtless a fair expression of our own feelings concerning these mysterious visions of the unconscious hours. Whatever harmony there may be between them and events which thereafter transpire, we can never be sure at the time that they are prophetic.

In the Old Testament economy, however, dreams were a recognized method of divine communication with mankind. Not only were Abraham and Jacob, Joseph and Solomon thus addressed from heaven, but the prophets received revelations in and through them. Designed for the warning, the comfort and the instruction of the race, few dreams narrated in sacred writ are of such profound interest as the one of which our text makes mention. In the second year of his reign "Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, his palace and his spirit were troubled and his sleep broke from him." So profound was the impression made upon him, so agitated his mind on awakening, that he commanded the presence of magicians, astrologers and soothsayers, who were supposed to possess the powers of interpretation. The dream of the king had, however, so far gone from him when the wise men entered into his presence that he could give them no hint of its nature. Not even the bare outline remained, only a sense of terror and the fear of impending ill. With the king's mind to himself he demanded that they should at once reproduce the dream by their mystic arts and give the correct interpretation. Protest was in vain, and in the heat of his passion he decreed the death of all the wise men of the kingdom.

Daniel, the prophet, captive at the time in Babylon, learning of the manifesto of the king, petitioned for an extension of time and promised the sought for interpretation. It was an awful crisis, but from the quartet of Daniel and his three companions went up a cry that reached the throne of God and won the secret that nullified an infamous decree. Within the appointed time the prophet is ready for the presence chamber of the king. An ambassador from heaven, he brings in clear outline, by his own interpretation, the mystical image which had disturbed the slumbers of Nebuchadnezzar, and then interprets its significance as may be traced in the second chapter of the book of Daniel, verses 31 to 36.

By the "head of gold" was represented the Kingdom of Babylon, the domain of Nebuchadnezzar for forty years. The "breast and arms of silver" signified the kingdom in which the Medes and Persians held sway, and was known as the Medo-Persian reign, inaugurated by Darius, the Mede, and Cyrus, the Persian, from whom an alliance had been formed. The third kingdom represented by the "belly and thighs of brass" was the Grecian, founded by Alexander the Great on his victory over the last of the Persian emperors. The joy of his conquest, however, was marred by his madness, for, boasting that he had conquered the world, he sat down and wept because "there was not another world to conquer."

The fourth kingdom symbolized, in the image, by the "legs and feet of iron," is commonly believed to be the Roman Empire. Toward its close it became weak and divided, breaking up into ten kingdoms, represented by the ten toes of the image. It could hardly be shown by an appeal to history how exactly all the events and the succession of events symbolized in the image came to pass, but we concentrate our attention on the significance of the "mystic stone," which by some unseen agency and in some unaccountable manner was seen to be detached from the mountain near by and to smite the image upon the feet, breaking into pieces the iron and the clay of which it had been composed. Nor was this all, for the stone which had smitten the image seemed to become a vast mountain which filled the whole earth. That the reference is to the Kingdom of the Messiah and a prophetic prophecy of its power and growth there can be no doubt, for the vision and its interpretation date back to 606 B. C. There is to be noticed, first, the assurance of the establishment of a divine kingdom in the world. Not only have we the symbolism of the mystic stone, but the definite language of prophecy. In his memorable interview with the king, Daniel declared: "In the days of these kings shall the God of Heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed." Similar and confirmatory prophecies might easily be culled from the sacred record. Many empires in the world have claimed their origin, or at least their emendation, to successes in war. Britain owes its prestige to Waterloo, Germany to Sedan, the United States to Gettysburg, Japan to Mukden. Power has been proclaimed at the point of the sword and sustained often through tyranny and cruelty. The strength of the powers of nations has been gauged by the roster of their armies and navies. Armies, fleets and military stores have been their pride and boast. Not so with the kingdom whose design, code and symbols date from all eternity. It is spiritual and not martial. It hath weapons before which strongholds crumble, but they are not carnal. It wins triumphs, but on almighty, bloodless battle fields. Not in the catalogue of nations does this kingdom claim a place. Alone it stands, without peer or counterpart. It bears the name and owns the sway of the Omnipotent. It was not to enter into conflict with existing governments. It was to be devotional, not political. The cross was to be its sacred symbol, not a crown. Its laws were to be transcribed not in ponderous statute books, not in legislative enactments, but in that precious book whose very name even has become a benediction. Through the Scriptures it sets forth in terms unmistakable the divine character of the new kingdom and when at length the Messiah had entered upon His holy mission He designated the common expectation in His announcement: "My Kingdom is not of this world." Again and again might He have assumed the symbols of royalty and won an enthusiastic following. Indeed, He was compelled to resist the passionate ardor of the people at times, who longed for a crowned head and a deliverer from the Romans. Persistent was His emphasis upon spiritual truth. He demanded a piety not interpreted by long prayers and

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16. "Not of the world." They do not partake of its spirit or follow in the wake of its ungodly practices. "Ever abiding," etc. Christ's true followers partake of His nature and are led and controlled by Him. They are one of God (I. V. 17). A prayer that they may be sanctified (vs. 17-19). "Sanctify them." I. The idea at the root of the word rendered "sanctify" is separation. It is opposed not to what is impure, but to what is common, and is constantly used in the Gospels to denote the separation for the consecration of persons and things to the service of God. "Through thy truth." "In the truth,"—R. V. The "truth" is the sum of the Christian revelation, "the word of God" as once embodied in Christ and spoken by His apostles. It is the system into which the believer is introduced, and by which he is changed. What the eleven needed above all things was a profounder apprehension of Christian truth, and a holier character.

18. "Hast sent Me." To redeem and save the world. "I also sent them." To carry on the same work by preaching the truth and leading men to God. As the apostles were directed to ordain others to the same work it is evident that a body of ministry, issuing from God Himself, existed in the Christian church. 19. "I sanctify Myself." I consecrate and devote Myself to death, that I may thereby purchase eternal salvation for them. Thus as a Redeemer He made perfect through suffering. "He that is sent," etc. He would not ask them to do what He was unwilling to do Himself, 2. By His sanctification He set them a true example. 3. By His sanctification, which led to the atonement on the cross, He presented every motive for their sanctification, and gave them new spiritual life.

III. A prayer for the unity of all believers (vs. 20-23). 20. "Neither for these alone." Our intercessor now broadens His scope so widely that every man may enroll himself in the limits of His prayer. "The words of the Father." Those who were led to God through the preaching of the gospel through the preaching of believers. This is the means God uses for the conversion of men (Rom. 10:14, 15).

21. "All may be one." This prayer was literally answered in the case of the first believers who were all of one heart (Acts 4:32). And why is it that believers are not in the same spirit now? Because they neither attend to the example nor to the truth of Christ. "World may believe." The unity of believers is the means of leading men to Christ. Nothing is so destructive and destroys faith in the earth as division among God's people. 1. Christian unity shows the power of the Christian religion. Only a mighty power could effect such a result from the widely differing elements of which the church is composed. 2. The unity of the nature of religion, in that it produces the same characteristics in all. 3. A united band is far more effective in overcoming the world and conquering evil.

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I. Christ's prayer that His apostles may be kept from evil (vs. 15, 16). "I pray not," etc. He would not have them with Him yet, nor would He have them escape from the active tempting world. "From the evil one (B. V.) the devil, Christ prays that they may be delivered from the deception and power of Satan.

16. "Not of the world." They do not partake of its spirit or follow in the wake of its ungodly practices. "Ever abiding," etc. Christ's true followers partake of His nature and are led and controlled by Him. They are one of God (I. V. 17). A prayer that they may be sanctified (vs. 17-19). "Sanctify them." I. The idea at the root of the word rendered "sanctify" is separation. It is opposed not to what is impure, but to what is common, and is constantly used in the Gospels to denote the separation for the consecration of persons and things to the service of God. "Through thy truth." "In the truth,"—R. V. The "truth" is the sum of the Christian revelation, "the word of God" as once embodied in Christ and spoken by His apostles. It is the system into which the believer is introduced, and by which he is changed. What the eleven needed above all things was a profounder apprehension of Christian truth, and a holier character.

18. "Hast sent Me." To redeem and save the world. "I also sent them." To carry on the same work by preaching the truth and leading men to God. As the apostles were directed to ordain others to the same work it is evident that a body of ministry, issuing from God Himself, existed in the Christian church. 19. "I sanctify Myself." I consecrate and devote Myself to death, that I may thereby purchase eternal salvation for them. Thus as a Redeemer He made perfect through suffering. "He that is sent," etc. He would not ask them to do what He was unwilling to do Himself, 2. By His sanctification He set them a true example. 3. By His sanctification, which led to the atonement on the cross, He presented every motive for their sanctification, and gave them new spiritual life.

III. A prayer for the unity of all believers (vs. 20-23). 20. "Neither for these alone." Our intercessor now broadens His scope so widely that every man may enroll himself in the limits of His prayer. "The words of the Father." Those who were led to God through the preaching of the gospel through the preaching of believers. This is the means God uses for the conversion of men (Rom. 10:14, 15).

21. "All may be one." This prayer was literally answered in the case of the first believers who were all of one heart (Acts 4:32). And why is it that believers are not in the same spirit now? Because they neither attend to the example nor to the truth of Christ. "World may believe." The unity of believers is the means of leading men to Christ. Nothing is so destructive and destroys faith in the earth as division among God's people. 1. Christian unity shows the power of the Christian religion. Only a mighty power could effect such a result from the widely differing elements of which the church is composed. 2. The unity of the nature of religion, in that it produces the same characteristics in all. 3. A united band is far more effective in overcoming the world and conquering evil.

22. "Have given them." Christ's glory is in them even now. In various degrees, a spark, a slender shaft of beaming luminousness, destined to shine in eternal splendor in the celestial firmament.

23. "Perfect in one." The unity of the church consists in doctrine and in spirit. The history of angelical doctrine finds that the systems of great outlines, forms a grand architectural structure, extending through ages, identical in its general outlines, and excluding all mere half-faiths, heresies, novelties and infidelities. As such a system it does, by its consistency, strength and permanency, form a powerful proof of the reality of the Christian faith, calculated to make the world believe.

IV. A prayer that they may be partakers of His glory (vs. 24-26). 24. "Father." The relationship is the ground of the prayer. He knows that His will is one with His Father's. "I will." Not I pray, nor I ask, but this is My will. He speaks as a son returned to his father's house, who tells in loving confidence how he will have things. He brings His beloved comrades with Him, and says to the Father what a glorious prince He is, and in what a glorious palace. "Behold My glory." In the sense of sharing and enjoying it, for the faithful shall also reign with Him (2 Tim. 2:12). Behold His glory we are all changed into the same immortal glory to glory (Cor. 3:18). The real import of Christ's prayer is that all who believe on Him should continue to love and serve Him while in this world and then be eternally united with Him.

25. "Righteous Father." God has not only His personal and judicial and governmental aspect. He is not only a Father, but a Judge and Sovereign. "Not known." Would not acknowledge; was willfully ignorant. 26. "May be in them." May rule in their hearts as a guiding principle, without which they cannot receive the promised here promised; for "he that loveth not, knoweth not God" (1 John 4:8). "I in them." These last words of Christ's mediatorial prayer sum up its purpose. He is going away and yet abides with them.

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